

VZCZCXRO7706
PP RUEHDT RUEHHM
DE RUEHCHI #0198 3180355
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
P 140355Z NOV 06
FM AMCONSUL CHIANG MAI
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0324
INFO RUEHXS/ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS
RUEHBK/AMEMBASSY BANGKOK PRIORITY 0592
RUEHCHI/AMCONSUL CHIANG MAI PRIORITY 0362

UNCLAS CHIANG MAI 000198

SIPDIS

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ECA/A/S/A FOR DOROTHY MORA

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [OEXC](#) [SCUL](#) [CVIS](#) [KPAO](#) [TH](#)
SUBJECT: ENGLISH CONTESTS, TEEN SPIRIT MARK INTERNATIONAL ED WEEK

REF: STATE 183414

¶1. Chiang Mai's 2006 Ed-eXpo USA consolidated a now four-year tradition of celebrating International Education Week in northern Thailand with English language competitions, a briefing on student visas, and a Fulbright presentation on scholarship opportunities. The steadily growing event this year attracted over 400 high school students, teachers and guests.

¶2. Local enthusiasm for this annual education event is echoed in the U.S. Consulate General's records showing a 21 percent growth in student visa applications since 2004, the result of increased interest and financial ability to pursue U.S. study on the part of northern Thai students. Applications for J visas have increased at an even greater rate, more than tripling in the last two years, primarily thanks to concerted recruiting by work/travel agencies.

¶3. For the fourth year in a row, the IC-ACE advising center, part of the Department's EducationUSA network, planned and hosted the all-day Ed-eXpo USA in partnership with the U.S. Consulate General, the Embassy's Regional English Language Office, and the Thai-U.S. Educational Foundation (TUSEF). Recognizing that the Nov. 3 event this year had outgrown the IC-ACE facilities at Chiang Mai University (CMU), the organizers got permission to use the university's prestigious Faculty of Architecture. Additional partners included Santa Monica College, Foothill & De Anza Colleges, the CMU American Corner, and Pepsico Thailand.

¶4. Twelve schools from four northern Thai provinces competed in the "Ace! Olympiad" through a series of English language and U.S. culture contests. Olympiad competitions included an SAT-style test of critical reading and math, a contest featuring American hit songs, a chance to design and build U.S.-themed architectural models, a day-long series of tasks of critical thinking and integrated English communication skills, and TOEFL-style essay writing and English proficiency tests. Prizes were awarded for each competition, with the U.S. Consul General's Challenge Cup going to the school team with the highest total score.

¶5. Normally subdued Thai students cheered and whooped for their schools during the afternoon prize ceremony, even though some had left home at 4 am to reach Chiang Mai for the opening events. The continued growth and popularity of Ed-eXpo USA, which this year added schools in Chiang Rai and Lamphun as well as previous contestants from Chiang Mai and Lampang provinces, has made it the region's premier event to promote U.S. educational opportunities and publicize the services of the IC-ACE advising center.

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